DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 535 IR 012 740

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TITLE An Historical Analysis of Form, Style, and Instructional Design in Teaching Films.
PUB DATE Feb 87
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the annual Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (Atlanta, GA, February 26-March 1, 1987). For the complete proceedings, see IR 012 723.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Documentaries; Film Production; *Film Study; *Instructional Design; *Instructional Films; Research Proposals
IDENTIFIERS AECT Research and Theory Division Meeting

ABSTRACT

A study is proposed to address five questions about the interrelationship of instructional intent and film form and style: (1) What are the stylistic elements within the teaching film, and how are these elements used to present epistemological content? (2) Does the instructional component of the teaching film take on a formal or stylistic function in the film? (3) In what way does the lesson structure the teaching film? (4) Is the form of the filmed lesson determined by design practices prescribed by formal theories of learning and instructional design research? and (5) In what ways do educational films specifically structure the learning experience? The proposed study will perform a systematic analysis of a historical sampling of educational films produced between 1930 and 1970 to give a detailed picture of the phenomenon of educational film and to develop a model of the teaching film of this period. The study will be based on the assumptions that educational films existed in an environment dominated by Hollywood films, and that producers of educational films were aware of work being done by others in the field. Eleven references are listed. (MES)

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An Historical Analysis of Form, Style and Instructional Design in Teaching Films

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It is widely assumed that educational media forms teach because they follow prescribed methods of instruction. It is further assumed that all types of mediated instruction share commmonalities of form and style, not only between themselves but also with all other teaching forms, and therefore that there are more similarities than differences between all conventional teaching methods.

If these are the assumptions that guide educational media production and use, then we can expect that the instructional motivation within each educational medium will determine the principle formal design elements and all forms of educational communication will share a characteristic style of presentation. But Sless reminds us that, "education is parasitic on the modes of communication available in our culture" (1981, p.41). Educational films for example, draw form and style from the dominant mode of filmmaking. Educational dramatizations and "trigger films" produced for educational purposes use traditional Hollywood techniques of narrative development (Newren, 1974). Educational films use the techniques of cinematography and editing which are familiar in popular films, but they adapt these stylistic qualities for their own educational needs, creating in the process another film style.

Although an estimated 25,000 non-entertainment films are produced each year (Perkins, 1982), few studies have been carried out that investigate the educational film genre. Educational film, with its own history and purpose is distinct in form from entertainment film. The specific norms which define educational films as distinct from the popular entertainment form of the classical Hollywood film, or documentary films have never been established.

Without a body of critical and historical literature to refer to, educational technologists may well assume that that the norms of educational film form and style can be traced to the widely accepted theories of instruction design, with their goals to structure the mediated lesson to the needs of the learner, and the hierarchically structured goals of instruction. But instructional design theories were not available to filmmakers before the late 1950's, while educational films were produced in great numbers from the early 1920's. Obviously strategies for making formal and stylistic choices other than Instructional Design must have guided early educational film producers.

We cannot assume that educational films simply mirror whatever instructional method has guided their production. Filmmaking is a social practice and not a simple reflection of one form of instruction into another, it necessarily transforms one type of learning event into another type. Educational films offer learning experiences that are specific to their medium.

I will address these concerns by posing a series of questions that focus on the interrelationship between instructional intent and film form and style, and on the structure of the lesson in teaching films. The questions I will attempt to answer are: What are the stylistic elements within the teaching film and how are these elements used to present epistemological content? Does the instructional component of the teaching film take on a formal or stylistic fuction in the films? In what way does the "lesson" structure the teaching film? Is the form of the filmed lesson determined by design practices prescribed by formal theories of learning and instructional design research? And finally, in what ways does educational film specifically structure the learning experience?

"Formal" norms of educational film refer to the major parts of the film and the general system of all relationships among the parts (Bordwell and Thompson, 1986, p. 383). "Stylistic" norms are defined as "repeated and salient uses of film techniques characteristic of a single film" (p. 385). All films are constructed of aesthetic elements and each type or genre of film is characterized by its own norms which are typical to that group (Schatz, 1981). The norms of any film group can be attributed to the the goals and purpose of that group. Any study of the educational film form therefore, must of necessity, concern itself first with the influence of the educational intent on the film form.

For the purpose of this study, I will confine my analysis to classroom or teaching films produced between 1930 and 1970.

Educational films are produced for a variety educational purposes and any film may be employed in diverse ways (McClusky, 1948; Wittich, 1948). Documentaries and many educational dramatizations are produced to influence attitudes and model behavior (Bluem, 1965). Teaching films however, are specifically produced to be used within the classroom to supplement classroom material, and correlate to specific lessons in the school curriculum (Wittich, 1948; Waldron, 1949). The purpose of the teaching or classroom film is to present facts, demonstrate processes or show causal relationships (Bluem, 1965). A teaching film is most commonly a 16mm, single reel, sound film, under 25 minutes in length. presented

by the teacher and viewed by a class in a group setting. Because of their explicit educational purpose, teaching films are the most appropriate to the concerns of my study.

The production period between 1930 and 1970 commences just after the introduction of the 16mm film and sound technology that is prevalent in the teaching film. It includes the period when demands for educational films were the heaviest. The selection of films from this period will include films produced both before and after the development of formal models of instructional design. At the same time, it spans a period wide enough to allow for generalizations in production styles which may have been unique, or motivated by popular taste of any one particular time.

For the purpose of my study, a systematic analysis of an historical sampling of educational films will be used to provide a detailed picture of the phenomenon of educational film.

My study will be based on several assumptions that will be addressed in part in the course of the work.

The first is that educational films exist within a culture dominated by Hollywood films. In order to be intelligible to audiences, educational film in the U.S. draw from a range of formal and styles that draw heavily from traditions of Hollywood classical cinema. This historical situation will allow me to apply the categories of classical narrrative film form and style indentified by Bordwell and Thompson (1986) to the narrow genre of educational film.

My second assumption is that producers of teaching films were aware of work being done by others in the field, and that a general practice of educational film production existed. The commonalities of form and style identified within the classification of teaching film will constitute a norm, and will apply generally to all teaching films produced during the period of the study.

Forty to fifty films will be chosen for the study from the collection in the American Archives of the Factual Film at Iowa State University at Ames, Iowa. Given that this is an inititial study, and given the constraints of time and resources, this will allow for a representation of films from each decade in the study. From the original sample, fifteen films which are most representative of the range of form and style will be selected for more detailed analysis.

I will produce a detailed analysis of each film by using a formalist method of film analysis defined in the work

of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) to identify the major parts of the film and the general system of all relationships among the parts and the repeated and salient uses of film techniques which are characteristic of the films.

To define the formal and stylistic elements present in each film, I will produce a detailed analysis of each film that first identifies the characteristics of its visual elements. Second, my analysis will concern itself with the audio track, the narration and sound effects and their relationship to the corresponding visual elements. Finally, my analysis will attempt to identify pedogogical principles within the design and content of each film and their relation to the formal and stylistic elements present.

Elements of lesson design and organization will be identified from prescriptions of instructional theory and practice. To accomodate films produced prior to the development of formal models of instructional design, I will identify these elements from historical textbooks on lesson design and teaching methods. In addition, I will analyze formal models of Instructional Design for elements of lesson design and apply them to my analysis of the films. Films will be compared to prescribed practices of lesson design to determine whether the logic that underlies instructional practice also underlies film form and style. Changes in the form, style, and lesson design of the filmed lesson will be traced across time.

Finally, my study will attempt to define how the medium of the educational film is a distinct kind of film and educational practice with its own conventions. It will offer a model of the teaching film produced between 1930 and 1970, that will articulate the elements of film form, style, and instructional design, and describe the relationship of these elements.

The focus of our field is on "the study of communication devices and the contraints these devices impose on the structuring, encoding, transmission, reception, and subsequent reconstruction of knowledge by learners" (Jonassen, 1984, p. 154).

Educational films construct a "media experience" which impose structural and processing requirements on learners. While it is not within the scope of my study to address specific issues of cognition and perception activities on the part of the viewer, my study will be conducted with the understanding that the teaching film, like every other educational media form developed subsequently, encourages specific activities on the part of the viewer which are in part unique to that form, and in

part an adaptation of existing educational and film forms and practices. The difference in structural and processing requirements between educational media forms is a function of the nature of the individual technologies themselves as well as the cultural practices that use them.

My study will show in what way production opportunities available through the already established medium of film were utilized in conjuction with widely established prescriptions of instructional design to create the first educational media form designed for broad distribution and independent use.

Asking these questions the way that I have will contribute to an understanding of how the characteristics of a technology and the norms of its usage interact to determine the form of instruction presented by that technology. An historical analysis of how instructional intent affects film form and style; and how film form and style shape the learning experiences of educational film users, is long overdue. Such a study will bring us closer to understanding ways in which a learners's experience of educational films is not a direct result of a kind of technology, but depends upon complex interactions between viewer expectations of film, determined by the broader uses and roles of film in the culture; and the way educational filmmakers saw their work in relation to film on one hand, and available instructional designs on the other.

It is only after the distinctions between media forms can clearly be identified that the study of the comparison of the "media experience" offered through individual media technolgies can be undertaken.

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